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Letter dated 23 May 2005 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to my first semi-annual report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) (S/2005/272), in which I informed the Council that I had dispatched a technical military team to Lebanon to verify the full and complete withdrawal of all Syrian troops, military assets and intelligence apparatus. I hereby transmit to the Council the report of the verification team (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would bring it to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**

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Annex

Report of the United Nations mission to verify the full and complete withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon pursuant to Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) — 26 April to 13 May 2005

I. Introduction

1. In the first semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) (S/2005/272) it was noted that a United Nations mission was despatched to verify the full and complete withdrawal of Syrian troops, military assets and intelligence apparatus from Lebanon.

2. The mission was carried out by a technical team of three United Nations military staff members: Brigadier General Elhadji Mouhamadou Kandji, the Deputy Military Adviser from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the team leader; Colonel Ian Sinclair, the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Force in Cyprus; Commander Kari Makinen, a staff officer in the Military Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations; and Galal Zeid, a United Nations interpreter. United Nations security personnel also supported the team.

II. Preliminary work (26-30 April 2005)

3. On 26 April 2005, the team deployed to Damascus, where the officers joined up with their interpreter and security personnel. On 27 and 28 April, the team held meetings with the Syrian military authorities to obtain relevant information on Syria's previous military and intelligence presence in Lebanon. The Syrian delegation consisted of Major General Adeeb Qasim, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Syrian Army; Major General Fayz Haffar, the last commander of Syrian forces in Lebanon; and Brigadier General Darwish, Head of the Senior Syrian Arab Delegates.

4. At the team leader's request, the Syrian military authorities provided the mission with documents and a marked map (1:50,000 scale) depicting the positions that Syrian forces and military intelligence had occupied before their final withdrawal in April 2005. The Syrian military authorities cooperated fully with the mission and provided an initial database of information from which the team could plan its verification work.

5. The mission then moved to Beirut by road on 28 April 2005, visiting on the way the former headquarters of Syrian forces in Lebanon, which had been located in Syrian territory, a few kilometres before the border crossing point on the highway to Lebanon. During this visit, the team also saw some Syrian forces and vehicles that had reportedly been withdrawn recently from Lebanon. After its arrival in Beirut, the team consulted with the Lebanese military authorities on 29 and 30 April, meeting Lieutenant General Michel Sleiman, the Chief of Staff of the Lebanese Armed Forces, and Brigadier General Emad Anka, who would accompany the team during its stay in Lebanon.

6. The Lebanese military authorities furnished the team with documents and maps showing former Syrian positions in Lebanon. The team then cross-referenced

these documents and maps with the information provided by the Syrian military authorities, thereby developing their database of information. Lieutenant General Sleiman assigned a team of military officers, led by Brigadier General Anka, to accompany the mission. In addition, military police were assigned to protect the team throughout its stay in Lebanon. The Lebanese military authorities cooperated fully with the mission and their support facilitated its work considerably.

7. The team also consulted with members of the defence attachés' community in Beirut on 29 April 2005 in order to develop further its understanding of the former Syrian military presence in Lebanon.

8. By the end of this series of consultations, the team had compiled a database of information on where Syrian military forces, assets and intelligence apparatus had been located in Lebanon before their final withdrawal. These locations were concentrated in two areas: the coastal strip to the west of Mount Lebanon around Beirut and Tripoli; and the Bekaa valley to the east.

9. The Syrian withdrawal was conducted in two phases:

(a) In the first phase, in March 2005, the majority of Syrian forces were withdrawn from the areas west of Mount Lebanon and concentrated in the Bekaa valley.

(b) In the second phase, which was apparently complete by 26 April 2005, the Syrians withdrew all military forces from the Bekaa valley and all remaining forces west of Mount Lebanon back to Syrian territory. A military ceremony was held on 26 April 2005 at Rayak airbase in the Bekaa valley to mark the final withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

10. The team then completed its mission analysis and subsequent planning for the verification task. The concept was to verify the Syrian withdrawal by visiting on the ground all of the former Syrian military locations that had been identified in the database of information. The verification was to be facilitated by the team of Lebanese military officers travelling with the mission and by local commanding officers and intelligence officers, who were able to guide the team in their respective sectors.

III. Conduct of the mission (1-13 May 2005)

A. General

11. The team began its verification activities on 1 May 2005 and for the following 10 days conducted verification on the ground throughout Lebanon. In addition to verifying locations in the database, the team also verified further locations when supplementary information came to light. Verification on the ground was conducted in three phases:

(a) In phase one (1-2 May), the team visited former Syrian locations to the west of Mount Lebanon, which were mostly concentrated in Beirut, Tripoli and the coastal areas north and south of the cities. Many of these positions had been vacated several years ago but a few had been recently abandoned.

(b) In phase two (3-7 May), the team verified the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the Bekaa valley, where signs of more recent presence were apparent.

(c) In phase three (10 May), the team carried out a final sweep of possible former Syrian locations south of Beirut and in the capital city.

12. The team conducted final meetings with the Lebanese military authorities on 11 May in Beirut and with the Syrian military authorities on 12 May at the border, before departing from Lebanon on 13 May 2005.

13. The team made a detailed register of the verification work, recording each position visited, confirming the geographic location accurately by the use of both map and global positioning system (GPS), recording the number of photographs taken of the position and noting any remarks about the position. The team took over 600 photographs to confirm what had been seen and collected evidence of former Syrian military presence whenever it was found. The team also recorded the status of abandoned Syrian defence works, in order to advise on their disposal or destruction, and noted the current use of former Syrian defence positions by Lebanese military forces.

B. Noteworthy verification events

14. On 4 May, the team visited the area of Qoussaya, where reports had indicated that Syrian military personnel or equipment might be found. Qoussaya is a Palestinian-controlled area in the eastern hills of the central Bekaa valley, not far from the border with the Syrian Arab Republic. At 0920 the team approached an entrance to the Palestinian camp, which was guarded by two armed Palestinians. One guard at once ordered the mission to leave. Despite assurances from the team's Lebanese escorts, the guard cocked his weapon to deny the team access. As the mission withdrew, the guard fired warning shots into the air. Access to Qoussaya was clearly denied to the team, which was therefore unable to verify Syrian withdrawal from that location. This incident was widely reported in the media and was the subject of a statement by the Secretary-General on 5 May.[1]

15. On 5 May, the mission was visiting the Deir Al-Ashayr area near the border with the Syrian Arab Republic in the east. The team noticed a military position, which turned out to be a Syrian battalion, apparently in Lebanese territory, according to the maps provided by both the Syrian and Lebanese military authorities. The team at once visited the location without escort. The Syrian commander (a Brigadier General) claimed that the position was inside the Syrian Arab Republic, pointing out a line of stone mounds in front of the location that allegedly marked the border. It should be noted that the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon have not yet agreed the demarcation of their border and are currently considering the issue at the highest political level. Although border demarcation was not a task of the mission, the lack of a defined border in the Deir Al-Ashayr area meant that the team was unable to verify whether the Syrian battalion was in Syrian or Lebanese territory.

16. The team was also concerned that Syrian military forces rather than border guards were occupying a position close to the border. The Syrian military authorities in Damascus had informed the team that all military units had returned to their barracks in the Syrian Arab Republic as from 26 April 2005 and only border guards remained in the border area. The team leader sought clarification from the Syrian

[1] Press release SG/SM/9854, dated 4 May 2005.

military authorities on this point and he was informed that a lack of border guards had required the use of a military unit in the area.

17. On 10 May, the team visited a small valley in the area of Naame, 15 kilometres south of Beirut, where reports had indicated that Syrian military personnel or equipment might be found. The valley was a Palestinian-controlled area. The Lebanese military authorities contacted the Palestinians to ensure safe passage for the team to enter the valley. The team was met on arrival, escorted up the valley and invited to enter a tunnel that had been built into the side of the valley. Palestinian representatives indicated that the team were the first outsiders to enter the complex, regretted any misunderstanding at Qoussaya and afforded the team every assistance at Naame. The representatives assured the team that there were no Syrian troops or equipment in the position. The team carried out a short tour of the tunnel and verified this statement to the extent possible, before returning down the valley and departing.

18. By the end of the day on 10 May, the team had visited almost every single location in its database of information, omitting only a few unimportant sites.

IV. Observations

19. The activities of the mission were of great interest to the Lebanese people and were closely reported by national and international media. The reason was the link made between the verification and three major issues of concern: the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, the border demarcation issue and the presence of Palestinian armed elements.

20. The team noted the long-standing military cooperation between the Syrian and Lebanese armies, which continues today even after the withdrawal. Lebanese officers still travel to the Syrian Arab Republic under this programme of cooperation and it is possible that Syrian military officers may visit Lebanon.

21. In some of the locations previously occupied by the Syrian military intelligence, such as the Hotel Beau Rivage in Beirut, the Villa Jaber outside Beirut and the American School in the Tripoli area, cells were found where it was apparent that prisoners had been held.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

22. After travelling more than 1,500 kilometres in Lebanon and visiting 133 former Syrian troop and military intelligence positions, the team found no Syrian military forces, assets or intelligence apparatus in Lebanese territory, with the exception of one Syrian battalion deployed near Deir Al-Ashayr. Eleven former Syrian positions had already been taken over by the Lebanese army. The mission has therefore concluded, to the best of its ability, with the possible exception of the Deir Al-Ashayr area, the status of which is unclear (see below), that Syrian troops and military assets have been fully and completely withdrawn from Lebanese territory.

23. There is no border agreement between the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, with no clear demarcation line on the ground. As a result, the team was unable to verify whether the Syrian military unit in the Deir Al-Ashayr

area was in Syrian or Lebanese territory. The status of that unit will be clarified once the two Governments have concluded a border agreement.

24. The withdrawal of the Syrian intelligence apparatus has been harder to verify because intelligence activities are by nature often clandestine. The team visited all the locations formerly used by the Syrian military intelligence apparatus and found them empty. The team has therefore concluded, to the best of its ability, that no Syrian military intelligence personnel remain in Lebanon in known locations or in military uniform. But the team has been unable to conclude with certainty that all the intelligence apparatus has been withdrawn.

25. The team encountered numerous earthworks and defences formerly used by Syrian forces, particularly in the Bekaa valley. In most cases, the earthworks consisted of earth walls but the mission also found underground bunkers and troop trenches. It is recommended that the Lebanese authorities dismantle any earthworks and defences that are assessed to pose a risk to Lebanese civilians.

26. The mission was required to assess whether a more comprehensive verification mission would be required. The team believes that such a mission would only retrace this team's steps in Lebanon and would still be unable to verify the complete withdrawal of clandestine intelligence apparatus. It is therefore recommended that a further verification mission is not required at this stage.

27. The team would like to record its thanks and appreciation to the Governments and military authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon for the hospitality and support provided to the mission throughout its stay in the region. Without this support, the planning and execution of the mission in Lebanon would have been made considerably more difficult. The team would also like to record its thanks to the United Nations organizations on the ground for their administrative and logistic support, which was essential to the success of the mission.

(*Signed*) Elhadji Mouhamadou **Kandji**
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Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Military Division
Verification team leader
New York, 23 May 2005